

Leisure time science in society

Science and technology are now an integral part of our everyday lives. Today, science no longer belongs exclusively to our schools, research institutes and universities. Thanks to popularization in the media, the basic concepts of science are now accessible to one and all.

Who has not heard of the ozone layer and of the greenhouse effect and its impact on global warming and the water cycle, or of the ethical and legal implications of new artificial fertilization techniques.

Try to imagine what our world would be like — even for a moment — without the computer, without television, without household appliances.

These few examples illustrate just how profoundly our culture has been shaped by scientific and technological progress. To turn our backs on the reality would be to turn away from the onward march of history and civilization.

Adolescence is a critical age, the age when young people forge their identities and form relations with their peers — of both sexes. They develop new intellectual abilities, shape their own value systems, acquire knowledge, define their goals: in short, they chart their passage toward adult life.

In this context, a structured association through which young people can practice and acquire such abilities, capacities and values represents a significant contribution to the development of emerging young personalities, and to their ability to take their place in society.

Obviously, I am referring to science clubs.

A successful science club should:

- ☐ Be made up primarily of young people;
- ☐ Engage in activities of a scientific nature;
- ☐ Function during leisure time;
- ☐ Have its own monitors or group leaders;
- ☐ Have an organized structure;
- ☐ Be involved in the community;

There should be no argument about the first four conditions; without them, no science club can exist. Thus I would like to deal here with the last two.

Organized structure

Any organism, whether biological or social, must have a structure in order to be viable. Likewise, to reach its goals a science club must have

a structure which defines its overall objectives as well as the rights and obligations of its members; it must also contribute to achieving these goals. The structure is simply a regulating mechanism which the club employs, first to sustain itself, then to grow.

The main components of this organized structure are its bylaws and its leaders. Helping to draw up a science club's bylaws and seeing that they are carried out are basic educational tasks, which help young people form interpersonal relationships while preparing them for a wider role in society.

Elections to leadership positions can also provide an excellent occasion for discussion among all participants, regardless of sex or belief, through which they can help shape their organization's objectives and strategies. Through the practice of democracy, all members can become citizens aware not only of their rights, but of their duties.

Community involvement

All club activity should have a community dimension. Of course, young people should do scientific projects, or duplicate experiments which have already been performed. But their results should also be shared with the other club members. The didactic and sociological value of presenting the fruits of an individual's efforts is a key educational consideration which club monitors should not neglect.

Science fairs are one part of this overall approach. But there are other, equally important factors: people who are normally uninterested in science, for example, can be reached through films or transparencies which describe, in clear, direct language, the experiments performed and their impact on society as a whole. Scientific programs on local media can also be used to publicize the club's activities and accomplishments.

Sharing scientific knowledge helps motivate young people, gives them a feeling of involvement, and builds group cohesion.

MILSET is an open movement which is concerned with both young people and with science. I believe this concern must put humanity before science. Only when we first instill human values will people work with dignity for science.

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MILSET Executive Committee member



Young people from Portugal and Morocco have had many occasions to fraternize in recent years.

Leisure science builds international understanding

Most MILSET members are already well acquainted with the close ties linking the Bouregreg science club of Salé, Morocco, and the S. Mamede Biology and Geology Club of Portalegre, Portugal.

But last May 21-25 saw these ties further strengthened when a Moroccan delegation attended festivities in Portalegre. Highlight of the visit was a discussion on

twinning two geographically similar but culturally different communities by their respective mayors.

Members and monitors of the two organizations have been staging exchange visits for several years now. The two clubs have drawn up a joint project to study flora, migratory birds and minerals. And at ESI '91 in Prague they shared a stand.

Readers will also recall

that the Portuguese club won the 1991 MILSET Award for its commitment to international cooperation, not only with Morocco, but also in assisting four African countries whose official language is Portuguese to set up science clubs.

Science clubs from Portugal and Morocco have proved once again that leisure science is a force for international understanding.

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